

## The Good Father – Matthew 7:7-14

What is our Heavenly Father like?

This is the theme of the verses we want to look at today. Last week we saw that we should not be quick to judge, and one of the reasons is we do not know enough most of the time to make a good judgement. This also true when we think about God. There are so many mistaken opinions about what God is like, and some of those wrong views are keeping people away from God. For instance, there are those who see God as the constant judge of all we do and say, just waiting to catch us doing something wrong so He can bring punishment down on us. With a view of God like that, who would want to get to know Him?

But the God revealed in scripture is nothing like that. We judge Him wrong if that is the concept we carry around in our minds. So Jesus gives us a glimpse of God in these verses that will help us know the truth about our Heavenly Father.

Jesus starts with a call to pray. He almost challenges us to try it and see what happens, for Jesus knows exactly what the Heavenly Father is like. Our God is a generous God.

Ask, Seek, Knock

Jesus challenges His followers to come to the Heavenly father and Ask, Seek, and knock. Coming to God with requests is simply what we call prayer. Ask for what you want. Seek that which seems to be lost, or taken away from you. Knock when you feel shut out and alone. Each of these commands is given in a Greek tense which means keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking. Don't just do it once and walk away. Make it a continual practice in your life.

You see, this is less about pounding on the door of heaven until you get what you want. This is more about developing a never ending conversation with God, always asking, seeking and knocking. Jesus does not want to hear us say, "I guess there is nothing else we can do. We might as well pray!"

No, instead Jesus would have us start with prayer, and continue in prayer.

Last week when it was discovered Elsa was having a heart attack while we were doing Bible Study on Zoom, we all stopped and prayed. We were not waiting to hear the doctor say, "He did all he could," to start praying. No, the Bible Study group stopped the Study to joining with Grace and John as they committed this situation to the Lord. And as you all may know, the Lord brought Elsa through yet another trial. Ask, seek, knock.

"Oh, I can't ask anything from God Pastor," you might say. "I don't deserve anything from Him."

Well, to make sure we don't back away from prayer Jesus repeats the three fold invitation to prayer but this time adds some encouragement for all of us. Notice what he says:

- All who ask receive
- All who seek find
- All who knock will find the door opened.

Notice that Jesus says "everyone?" Not the professional pray-ers, not the super good saints, not the people with the fancy words or gift of some unknown language. He promises all will be heard by the Heavenly Father and will be answered.

Hold it right there, Pastor. I have prayed many prayers that were not answered. How can you say that whenever a Christian asks, seeks or knocks God hears and answers?

First, I am telling you what Jesus said.

Second, I believe God always answers prayers that come from a heart truly seeking God's answers. James 4:3 warns about asking from a wrong motive:

When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Third, God's answers may not always be what we were looking for, so we miss His answers. We may have prayed for a safe, uneventful trip but suddenly we get a flat tire. "Why would you do that to me?" we ask of God. "Why didn't you answer my prayer?" Then we find out that there was a terrible accident or a rockslide on the road and because we stopped to fix the tire, we missed it. God had answered our prayer, just not in the way we expected.

Fourth, God sometimes says "No." God does know what is best for us and sometimes He says "No" to our request. But doesn't that contradict what Jesus just said, "Ask and you will receive?" Again the answer is no, for God only wants to give good gifts to His children. We can ask too small, or for the wrong things, so He says "No" until we figure out what we really should ask for....

A little girl from a very poor, impoverished country had just been adopted by a loving couple from Canada. It was getting close to Christmas so the Dad took his new daughter into Toys-R-Us and said she could have anything in the store. The little girl had never seen such a place, filled with so many toys and games. For over an hour she walked through the store looking at everything. The salesman got excited when she walked by the big items, like bikes and doll houses. Finally she found what she wanted and put it on the counter. It was a \$2 trinket. That's all she wanted.

God offers us so much – peace, joy, hope, purpose, direction, love – and he will supply all our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus our Lord. And He waits to see what we will ask of Him, and we hold up a little trinket. Most things in this world are trinkets in comparison to eternity, but we often want things that tie us to this world, not our Heavenly home.... Trinkets.

Jesus is inviting his followers to come to the Heavenly Father and ask, seek and knock and we will find He always responds. Notice Jesus did not say, "IF." We tend to think God will respond "IF" I have enough faith; or "IF" I pray the right way, or "IF" I have lived a righteous life. I have looked over this text many times this week and I do not see the word "IF" at all.

In the next section, we find the word "if." Here Jesus asks if a good father would give bad gifts to his children? Would a father give his son a stone if he asks for bread, or a snake if he asks for a fish? Of course not! The father knows the child needs food, so he gladly provides what he can. Yes, even an earthly father who is worthy of the name "father" would do that much. How much more will our Heavenly Father delight in giving "good gifts" to His children when they ask him for something. And in Luke's Gospel Jesus would clarify that the greatest gift is the Holy Spirit. How much more does the Father want to give you the Holy Spirit if you ask.

With this kind of generous heart being displayed to us by the Heavenly Father, we are challenged to show a generous spirit to the people around us.

### The Golden Rule

In verse 12 Jesus challenges his followers to live with generosity to others. This verse has become known as the Golden Rule, and is only found in the Christian faith. Others have borrowed it since Jesus stated it but no one else had this principle in their teachings before Jesus. Some had statements of not doing harm if we do not want harm done to us, but no where else are people called to be so generous towards others than in the Christian faith. Of course, no other faith has a God as generous as the Christian God, so they do not have a pattern to follow as we do.

The Golden Rule speaks of doing good to others, just as you want them to do good to you. It is not about keeping rules – not even the Ten Commandments. It goes far beyond that. Keeping rules allows us to find a stopping place for our generosity. I do not kill, so I can check that off the list.

But Jesus says, go beyond. Do something to show the love and grace of God to others. It is not enough just to not do harm: we must find a way to do good.

Laws can only take us so far. I may keep the Ten Commandments but you still may not want to hang out with me. I may not harm you, but I also may not help you. Keeping the Law may prevent me from running over a pedestrian in a crosswalk, but the Golden Rule will cause me to pull over and offer the pedestrian a ride when he is stuck out in the rain.

W.H. Smith, British retailer of books and much more, once served at the War Office. On weekends he would travel to his cottage, and staff noted that he would take a box filled with paperwork to go through on the weekend. When asked why he did not just ship the papers like the other executives did, his reply was amazing. He said he saw the postman delivering the mail by his place and noted his hands were already full. He would save him the trouble of carrying these papers as well. The Golden Rule lived out.... (Barclay, Daily Study Bible: Matthew, p. 276)

Randal Denny says the “Ask, Seek and Knock” formula can work to fulfill the Golden Rule. We may ask how someone is doing, but that does not help them. So we may seek them out and find out by calling or emailing them. But when we show up at the door and knock then they will know you truly care. And in the end, isn’t that what we want others to do for us; “knock?”<sup>1</sup>

It was a cold wintery day in the city, but still the boy on the corner selling newspapers was barefoot. The preacher’s wife noticed this and asked, “Where are your shoes, lad?”

“I don’t have any,” the boy answered with embarrassment.

The preacher’s wife took the boy down the street to the department store and bought him a pair of shoes. The boy was so excited he ran out of the store without saying thank you. But a few moments he was back, and looking at the lady asked, “Are you God’s wife?”

A little embarrassed, she said, “No, I’m just one of his children.”

I thought you must be part of his family,” said the boy with a grin!<sup>2</sup>

We have a generous Heavenly Father, and His children are called to be generous in spirit as well. We cannot do this in our own strength, but the good news is we do not have to. God has given us the Holy Spirit to help us reflect the character of the Heavenly Father to our world.

But Jesus is not quite finished yet. Jesus has revealed that we have a very generous Father in Heaven, and that we are called to reflect that generosity here on earth. There is one last piece to our passage this morning, and that is to answer this question: How can we become part of God’s family? How can the Heavenly Father become MY Heavenly Father? Is everyone a child of God, or just some people?

This is what verses 13 and 14 address. There we read about a narrow way that leads to life, and a wide path that leads to destruction. Many people are finding the wide path, but few find the narrow way. Guess which one leads to the Heavenly Father?

The wide path represents the ways of the world, with its philosophies and values. This is the path we are all on by default – the path that most people in our world are on today. Sadly it is the path that leads to destruction. The path without Jesus is the pathway to hell. No matter how good a person is, how kind or how generous, without Jesus in their life they are on the wide road that leads to destruction.

Our Heavenly Father does not want anyone to be on that road. He does not want anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance. That means to change the direction of their lives. And since God in Heaven is a loving, kind, patient God He provided a rescue plan that would allow us to leave the road that leads to destruction and instead enter the narrow road that leads to life.

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<sup>1</sup> Randal Earl Denny, “Sunny Side of the Mount” (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1980), p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 91-92.

The plan can be summed up in a word: Jesus. He is the Way. He is the Door. He is the place where we find our lives can be redirected and rescued from destruction.

The narrow path that leads to life has one door or gate, and that door is Jesus. There is no other way to get on the narrow path that leads to life than to come to Jesus and seek forgiveness for our sins from him. Jesus died to rescue us from the wide path of destruction, and then gives this invitation: "Come, follow Me."

I speak to the children today: you do not have to be an adult to invite Jesus into your life. I was 8 years old when I asked Jesus to forgive me for all I did wrong, and come into my life.

But you are never too old either. I once sat with an old cowboy who was around 80 years old, and I told him about the love of the Father and how Jesus came to be our Saviour because of that love. I showed him a picture with Jesus knocking on the door, representing Jesus knocking on the door of our heart. I asked this man if he wanted to open the door and let Jesus in. His response was, "I'd be a fool not to!" Together we prayed and that 80 year old man was born again in that moment.

If it is so easy, why do so few find the way to the narrow path? Why are most people still on the wide road, even though it is the road that leads to destruction? Can't people hear the Father in love calling them to come to Him? Can't they see Jesus, see the nail scars in his hands to remind them of the price he paid to rescue them off the broad road that leads to destruction?

Sadly many people hear the Father calling to them but they turn their back. They see Jesus and know He died for them, but they still will not leave the broad road. Why?

The way to the narrow path of life can only be entered by humbling ourselves. We must bow before Jesus, the true King of kings, our Saviour, and submit ourselves to him. All of us. Our time. Our talents. Our desires. Our hopes and dreams. Everything. All must be given to him. We must confess we are sinners in need of forgiveness, and many refuse to do that. We must be willing to follow Jesus, and some think they lose their freedom if they do this.

What they do not know is that they will never be more free, happier, more content, more fulfilled than when they submit themselves to Jesus.

Yes, the way is narrow that leads to the Father and life. It is as wide as a cross. But that is where true life begins, at the foot of the cross. Humbly we bow our heads before Jesus and confess we are sinners who need his forgiveness. And then we ask him to take control of our lives and fill us with his Spirit. And the moment we say "Yes" to Jesus, we enter the narrow path that leads to life.

This morning we take Communion, the bread and wine that remind us of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross of Calvary so that we could be rescued from the way of destruction and brought to the path of life. Which path are you on today? Be sure you know you are on the narrow path that leads to the Heavenly Father. He made the way for you to come to him because he loves you. What will you say to him today?